

Coin, Vending, and Amusement Machine Servicers and Repairers

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Significant Points

- Most workers in this occupation learn their skills on the job.
- Opportunities should be especially good for persons with some knowledge of electronics.

Nature of the Work

Coin, vending, and amusement machines are a familiar sight in offices, convenience stores, arcades, and casinos. These coin-operated machines give out change, dispense refreshments, test our gaming skills, and spit out lottery tickets nearly everywhere we turn. Coin, vending, and amusement machine servicers and repairers install, service, and stock such machines and keep them in good working order.

Vending machine servicers, often called route drivers, visit machines that dispense soft drinks, candy and snacks, and other items. They collect money from the machines, restock merchandise, and change labels to indicate new selections. They also keep the machines clean and appealing.

Vending machine repairers, often called mechanics or technicians, make sure that the machines operate correctly. When checking complicated electrical and electronic machines, such as beverage dispensers, they ascertain whether the machines mix drinks properly and whether the refrigeration and heating units work correctly. If the machines are not in good working order, the mechanics repair them. On the relatively simple gravity-operated machines, repairers check the keypads, motors, and merchandise chutes. They also test coin, bill, and change-making mechanisms.

When installing machines, vending machine repairers make the necessary water and electrical connections and check the machines for proper operation. They also make sure that the installation complies with local plumbing and electrical codes. Because many vending machines dispense food, these workers, along with vending machine servicers, must comply with State and local public health and sanitation standards.

Amusement machine servicers and repairers work on jukeboxes, video games, pinball machines, and slot machines. They make sure that the various levers, joysticks, and mechanisms function properly, so that the games remain fair and the jukebox selections are accurate. They update selections, repair or replace malfunctioning parts, and rebuild existing equipment. Those who work in the gaming industry must adhere to strict guidelines, because Federal and State agencies regulate many gaming machines.

Preventive maintenance—avoiding trouble before it starts—is a major job of repairers. For example, they periodically clean refrigeration condensers, lubricate mechanical parts, and adjust machines so that they perform properly.

If a machine breaks down, vending and amusement machine repairers inspect it for obvious problems, such as loose electrical wires, malfunctions of the coin mechanism or bill validator, and leaks. When servicing electronic machines, repairers test them with hand-held diagnostic computers that determine the extent and location of any problem. Repairers may only have to replace a circuit board or other component to fix the problem. However, if the problem cannot be readily located, these workers refer to technical manuals and

wiring diagrams and use testing devices, such as electrical circuit testers, to find defective parts. Repairers decide whether they must replace a part and whether they can fix the malfunction onsite or whether they have to send the machine to the repair shop.

In the repair shop, vending and amusement machine repairers use power tools, such as grinding wheels, saws, and drills, as well as voltmeters, ohmmeters, oscilloscopes, and other testing equipment. They also use ordinary repair tools, such as screwdrivers, pliers, and wrenches.

Vending machine servicers and repairers employed by small companies may both fill and fix machines on a regular basis. These combination servicers-repairers stock machines, collect money, fill coin and currency changers, and repair machines when necessary.

Servicers and repairers also do some paperwork, such as filing reports, preparing repair cost estimates, ordering parts, and keeping daily records of merchandise distributed and money collected. However, new machines with computerized inventory controls reduce the paperwork that a servicer must complete.

Working Conditions

Some vending and amusement machine repairers work primarily in company repair shops, but many spend substantial time on the road,



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visiting machines wherever they have been placed. Repairers generally work a total of 40 hours a week. However, vending and amusement machines operate around the clock, so repairers may be on call to work at night and on weekends and holidays.

Vending and amusement machine repair shops generally are quiet, are well lighted, and have adequate workspace. However, when machines are serviced on location, the work may be done where pedestrian traffic is heavy, such as in busy supermarkets, industrial complexes, offices, casinos, or arcades. Repair work is relatively safe, although servicers and repairers must take care to avoid hazards such as electrical shocks and cuts from sharp tools and other metal objects. They also must follow safe work procedures, especially when moving heavy vending and amusement machines.

Employment

Coin, vending, and amusement machine servicers and repairers held about 43,000 jobs in 2002. Most repairers work for vending machine operators that sell food and other items through machines. Others work for beverage manufacturing companies that have their own coin-operated machines. A growing number of servicers and repairers work for amusement, gambling, and recreation establishments that own video games, pinball machines, jukeboxes, slot machines, and similar types of amusement equipment. Although vending and amusement machine servicers and repairers are employed throughout the country, most are located in areas with large populations and, thus, many vending and amusement machines.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Most workers learn their skills on the job. New workers are trained informally on the job to fill and fix machines by observing, working with, and receiving instruction from experienced repairers. Employers normally prefer to hire high school graduates; high school or vocational school courses in electricity, refrigeration, and machine repair are an advantage in qualifying for entry-level jobs. Employers usually require applicants to demonstrate mechanical ability, either through work experience or by scoring well on mechanical-aptitude tests.

Because coin, vending, and amusement machine servicers and repairers sometimes handle thousands of dollars in merchandise and cash, employers hire persons who seem to have a record of honesty. Also, the ability to deal tactfully with people is important, because the servicers and repairers play a significant role in relaying customers' requests and concerns. A driver's license and a good driving record are essential for most vending and amusement machine servicer and repairer jobs. Some employers require their servicers to be bonded.

As electronics become more prevalent in vending and amusement machines, employers will increasingly prefer applicants who have some training in electronics. Technologically advanced machines with features such as multilevel pricing, inventory control, and scrolling messages use electronics and microchip computers extensively. Some vocational high schools and junior colleges offer 1- to 2-year training programs in basic electronics.

Beginners start training with simple jobs, such as cleaning or stocking machines. They then learn to rebuild machines by removing defective parts and repairing, adjusting, and testing the machines. Next, they accompany an experienced repairer on service calls and, finally, make visits on their own. This learning process takes from 6 months to 2 years, depending on the individual's abilities, previous education, types of machines serviced, and quality of instruction.

The National Automatic Merchandising Association has a self-study technician training program for vending machine repairers. Manuals give instruction in subjects such as customer relations, safety, electronics, and reading schematics. Upon completion of the program, repairers must pass a written test to become certified as a technician or journeyman.

To learn about new machines, repairers and servicers sometimes attend training sessions sponsored by manufacturers and distributors that may last from a few days to several weeks. Both trainees and experienced workers sometimes take evening courses in basic electricity, electronics, microwave ovens, refrigeration, and other related subjects to stay on top of new techniques and equipment. Skilled servicers and repairers may be promoted to supervisory jobs or go into business for themselves.

Job Outlook

Employment of coin, vending, and amusement machine servicers and repairers is expected to grow about as fast as the average for all occupations through the year 2012, primarily because of the increasing number of vending and amusement machines in operation. Job openings for coin, vending, and amusement machine servicers and repairers will arise from employment growth and from the need to replace experienced workers who transfer to other occupations or leave the labor force.

Establishments are likely to install additional vending machines in industrial plants, hospitals, stores, and schools to meet the public demand for inexpensive snacks and other food items. Also, there is an increased need for vending machines in businesses with few employees. The range of products dispensed by the machines is expected to increase, as vending machines continue to become increasingly automated and begin to incorporate microwave ovens, minirefrigerators, and freezers. In addition, casinos, arcades, and other amusement establishments are becoming an increasing source of entertainment. State and multi-State lotteries are increasingly using coin-operated machines to sell scratch-off tickets in grocery stores and other public places.

Opportunities should be especially good for persons with some knowledge of electronics, because electronic circuitry is an important component of vending and amusement machines. If firms cannot find trained or experienced workers for these jobs, they are likely to train qualified route drivers or hire inexperienced people who have acquired some mechanical, electrical, or electronics training by taking high school or vocational courses.

Improved technology in newer machines will moderate employment growth because these machines require maintenance less frequently than do older ones. The new machines will need repairing and restocking less often, and they contain computers that record sales and inventory data, reducing the amount of time-consuming paperwork that otherwise would have to be filled out. The Internet is beginning to play a large role in the monitoring of vending machines from remote locations. In addition, some new machines use wireless data transmitters to signal the vending machine company when the machine needs restocking or repairing. This allows servicers and repairers to be dispatched only when needed, instead of having to check each machine on a regular schedule.

Earnings

Median hourly earnings of coin, vending, and amusement machine servicers and repairers were \$13.16 in 2002. The middle 50 percent earned between \$10.31 and \$16.43 an hour. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$8.07 an hour, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$20.12 an hour. Median hourly earnings were

\$11.69 in vending machine operators, the industry employing the largest number of coin, vending, and amusement machine servicers and repairers in 2002.

Typically, States with some form of legalized gaming have the highest wages. Most coin, vending, and amusement machine servicers and repairers work 8 hours a day, 5 days a week, and receive premium pay for overtime. Some union contracts stipulate higher pay for night work and for emergency repair jobs on weekends and holidays than for regular hours. Some vending machine repairers and servicers are members of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters.

Related Occupations

Other workers who repair equipment with electrical and electronic components include electrical and electronics installers and repairers; electronic home-entertainment equipment installers and repairers; heating, air-conditioning, and refrigeration mechanics and installers; and home appliance repairers.

Sources of Additional Information

Information on job opportunities in this field can be obtained from local vending machine firms and local offices of your State employment service. For general information on vending machine repair, contact:

- ▶ National Automatic Merchandising Association, 20 N. Wacker Dr., Suite 3500, Chicago, IL 60606-3102. Internet: <http://www.vending.org>
- ▶ Automatic Merchandiser Vending Group, Cygnus Business Media, P.O. Box 803, 1233 Janesville Ave., Fort Atkinson, WI 53538-0803.